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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 003955

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SUBJECT: Cabinet reshuffle enhances stability ahead of  
leadership transition

Ref: (A) Abu Dhabi 3855, (B) Abu Dhabi 3410, (C) Abu Dhabi  
1197

(U) Classified by Richard A. Albright, Charge d'Affaires,  
a.i., reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The UAE leadership announced a ministerial reshuffle late the evening November 1. The reshuffle further solidified the Al Nahyan control and rejuvenated the Cabinet with several younger technocrats, while retaining Dubai's Al Maktoum hierarchy in their titular federal roles. UAE President Sheikh Zayed's failing health (see reftels) makes the timing of these changes particularly significant because they put in place a new Cabinet, with Zayed's seal of approval, before the actual political transition occurs. The new 21-member Cabinet includes seven new members, three newly consolidated ministries, and the UAE's first-ever woman minister. End Summary.

Reshuffle enhances stability ahead of leadership transition  
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12. (C) Except for the appointment of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed as Deputy Prime Minister in October 2003, the Cabinet had been unchanged

since March 1997. During the past year, both Abu Dhabi Deputy Crown Prince and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) and his brother, de facto Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed (HbZ) told the Ambassador that they were planning to breathe new life into what had become a dysfunctional cabinet. They wanted to remove non-performing ministers and replace them with more technocrats and people of greater vision. In fact, the reason the very capable HbZ was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in October 2003 was to have him manage the new cabinet and help reinvigorate the UAE federal process. (Note: MbZ told former Ambassador Wahba in April that replacing titular Prime Minister Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid would be key to making other major ministerial changes. That has not yet happened, but it seems likely that Sheikh Zayed's failing health was enough to precipitate these limited, but welcome, changes even with Maktoum's continued presence on the scene. Maktoum, who has never exercised much authority in either his roles as Ruler of Dubai or as UAE Vice President, has desired to retire for some time. It appears that the Al Nahyan are retaining him as Vice President and Prime Minister for now, to maintain a stable transition and, perhaps, also because there is not another emirate ruler who presents a viable alternative. End note.)

13. (C) Once again, the Bani Fatima (the six sons of Sheikh Zayed and his most influential wife Fatima) have added to their power and influence with the appointment of Mansour bin Zayed to the Cabinet. He joins full brothers Hamdan and Abdullah under the leadership of Abu Dhabi Deputy Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. Full brothers Hazza and Tahnoun are, respectively, head of the intelligence services and chairman of the President's Private Department which oversees Zayed's private investments.

The new Cabinet lineup  
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14. (S/NF) The following is a description of the newly reconstituted Cabinet of Ministers, including brief profiles of each Minister:

-- Prime Minister: UAE Vice President Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum is the Ruler of Dubai, the second most powerful emirate in the UAE. Although he assumed titular power upon his father's death in 1990, he mostly left the running of the emirate to his two younger brothers, Hamdan bin Rashid and Mohammed bin Rashid; and likewise left the prime minister role to Deputy Prime Ministers Hamdan bin Zayed and Sultan bin Zayed. His role in the Federal Government is that of a figurehead. He spends most of his time in London.

-- Deputy Prime Minister: Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan is the second eldest son of the President. Sultan has a history of alcohol and chemical dependency and has spent some time in psychiatric institutions. The appointment of his younger half-brother MbZ as Deputy Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi in November 2003, effectively took him out of the running to be Ruler of Abu Dhabi. His official duty in chairing the Council of Ministers in the absence of Prime Minister Maktoum is largely titular.

-- Minister of Finance and Industry: Dubai Deputy Ruler Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum is the titular Finance Minister, though Minister of State for Finance Kharbash (a fellow Dubayyan) actually fills most aspects of the Finance Minister role for the UAE. Hamdan concentrates on the municipal and financial affairs of Dubai emirate.

-- Minister of Defense: Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (MbR) is the most dynamic and pro-business leader in the UAE, and is also one of our most important contacts. MbR and MbZ have developed a good rapport over the years, and they generally cooperate closely on most federal-level decisions. Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed is the real decision-maker in the military.

-- Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs: Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan (HbZ) is a son of President Sheikh Zayed and Sheikha Fatima. As the de facto Foreign Minister since 1990, HbZ is highly capable and works to cement political and economic ties with UAE's key partners. He plays a critical role in coordinating policy among the seven emirates and exerting discipline in the Cabinet. He is well briefed on substance and an engaging interlocutor.

-- [NEW MINISTER] Minister of Interior: Major General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan is a former Under Secretary at the Ministry of Interior and is also the Director General of the Abu Dhabi Police. Sheikh Saif is a powerful, respected, and feared son of Zayed. He is autocratic, delegating little authority to his subordinates. He is a graduate of UAE University in Al-Ain, and he studied English in the UK where he also attended a training program for police at Scotland Yard. He is a good friend of the U.S. and pays close attention to Embassy security.

-- [NEW CABINET POSITION] Minister for Presidential Affairs: Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan was formerly Director General for Presidential Affairs. He is one of the six sons of Sheikh Zayed and Sheikha Fatima. Mansour plays a powerful behind-the-scenes role in controlling access to Sheikh Zayed. It is unclear whether this role will continue when Crown Prince Khalifa assumes the presidency. In addition he is Deputy Chairman of the Sheikh Zayed Charitable Foundation, and Chairman of the International Petroleum Investment Corporation. Mansour was an English student at Santa Barbara Community College in 1989. He speaks English well, but his academic record was poor.

-- Minister of Information and Culture: Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan is the youngest of the sons of Sheikh Zayed and Sheikha Fatima. He has been a moderating influence on UAE media and has expanded free press in the UAE since taking office in 1997. Sheikh Abdullah has been a reformer by nature. He has chaired the bilateral Strategic Partnership meetings, has many contacts in the U.S., and speaks English fluently.

-- [MERGER] Minister of Education: Sheikh Nahyan is the former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. He is also Chancellor of all the public universities in the UAE. Sheikh Nahyan is a leading advocate of education reform in the UAE who is sometimes attacked by religious conservatives for his emphasis on women's education and refusal to limit access to the Internet. His appointment to this expanded portfolio bodes well for reform and bilateral cooperation. (Note: The merger of education ministries represents a reunion of a single ministry that had existed until 1992 when the Ministry of Higher Education was split off from the Ministry of Education. End note.)

-- [NEW MINISTER] Minister of Public Works: Sheikh Hamdan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan is the new Minister of Public Works. He is a younger brother of Minister of Education, Sheikh Nahyan. He is currently the chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Civil Aviation and a member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council.

-- [MERGER, MINISTER WITH CHANGED PORTFOLIO] Minister of Supreme Council and GCC Affairs: Formerly Minister of Economy and Commerce, Sheikh Fahim bin Sultan Al Qasimi has previously served as the UAE's permanent representative to the UN and Secretary General of the GCC. He holds an MA in political science from Johns Hopkins (SAIS). He is a cousin to the ruler of Ras Al Khaimah Emirate. He is married to an American.

-- Minister of Foreign Affairs: Rashid Abdullah Al Nuaimi is a figurehead whose role is largely confined to

representing the UAE in international fora and ceremonial gatherings. As a native of small Ajman emirate, he has little influence in Abu Dhabi. HbZ dominates the Ministry and makes all significant decisions. Rashid Abdullah is well disposed to the U.S. and his son is the very effective Under Secretary, the top career position in the MFA.

-- Minister of Health: Hamad Abdul Rahman Al Madfa has a MA in Political Science from John Hopkins University. He was appointed for the second time as Health Minister in 1996, and previously held several diplomatic appointments, including Charge d'Affaires to the United States, Ambassador to Iraq (1975-1977) and Ambassador to United States and Mexico (1977-1979).

-- Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs: Saeed Khalfan Al Ghaith is from Dubai and has been dealing with cabinet affairs since approximately 1977. His office functions as a secretariat to the federal cabinet and a liaison between the Cabinet and the individual ministries.

-- Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries: Saeed Mohammad Al Raqabani has been Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries since at least 1977, and has been involved in politics since the formation of the UAE. A native of the Emirate of Fujairah.

-- Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Awqaf: Mohammed Nakhira Al Daheri has been Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Awqaf since March 1997. He left the military to become UAE Attorney General in 1992 and served in that position until he was promoted to his present position in 1997.

-- Minister of State for Financial and Industrial Affairs: Dr. Mohammed Khalfan bin Kharbash continues in his role as the Minister of State (and de facto Minister of Finance). He is a well-regarded reformer who appears to have the support of both the Abu Dhabi and the Dubai ruling families. He is also Chairman of the Dubai Islamic Bank, which has the new Minister of Communication as the Vice-Chair.

-- [MERGER AND NEW MINISTER] Minister of Economy and Planning: Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is the first female Minister appointed to the UAE Cabinet. An excellent contact of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General, Sheikha Lubna is Chief Executive Officer of Tejari.com, an online marketplace. Educated at California's Chico State University, Sheikha Lubna is a warm, dynamic and highly intelligent leader who has cultivated close ties with many U.S. officials and business leaders. She is a true believer in open economies and free trade. Despite having achieved prominence in Dubai, as a high-profile protégé of MbR, Sheikha Lubna is actually a member of Sharjah Emirate's ruling family, and (as an unmarried woman) she continues to reside there with her mother and sisters.

-- [MERGER, NEW MINISTER] Minister of Energy: Mohammed bin Dha'en Al Hamili heads the new super Ministry of Energy, which combines the Ministry of Electricity and Water with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources. The new Minister of Energy is from the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and was most recently the director of Marketing and Refining for the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and was formerly the UAE governor to OPEC. He is a Harvard Business School graduate.

-- [NEW MINISTER] Minister of Communications: Sultan bin Saeed Al-Mansouri is the new Minister of Communications. He is from Dubai and is a Chairman of the Dubai Islamic Insurance and Reinsurance Co. (AMAN) and a Vice-Chairman of Dubai Islamic Bank. Since 1998, he has been a managing partner of Al Nabooda Group. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan. He appears to be an ally of Minister of State for Financial and Industrial Affairs, Dr. Mohammed Khalfan bin Kharbash.

-- [NEW MINISTER] Minister of Labor and Social Affairs:  
New Minister Dr. Ali bin Abdullah Al Ka'abi is a Manager at the UAE Offsets Group. He holds a PhD in Engineering Management, and Software and Information System Management from George Washington University. He is also a graduate of Sandhurst University Military College. He has previously worked as an IT advisor with the UAE Armed Forces, an IT Manager in the Washington office of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), and an IT Manager in the office of the UAE Military in Washington. After his appointment, he stated that his priority would be to address the UAE's demographic challenges.

Comment:

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¶5. (C) After last year's appointments of Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed as Deputy Prime Minister and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed as Deputy Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the UAE leadership has taken a significant, further step to project stability through a new cabinet announced under the authority of the ailing Sheikh Zayed. This reshuffle, the first in seven years, strengthens the firm grip of the Al Nahyan on the UAE government, and with the appointment of Sheikh Mansour, gives a ministerial title to a third Bani Fatima brother, all under the not-so-behind-the-scenes leadership of Abu Dhabi Deputy Crown Prince and Armed Forces Chief of Staff MbZ. Perhaps the most significant appointment is the elevation of Sheikh Saif to Minister of Interior. Outgoing Interior Minister Mohammed Al Badi hails from a tribe that owes its allegiance to Crown Prince Khalifa. Sheikh Saif is known to have close ties to MbZ and we will be watching this alignment. By consolidating several ministries and bringing in some dynamic new technocrats, the reshuffle has the potential to achieve the stated goals of MbZ and HbZ to improve the functioning of the UAE's loose federal system. The appointment of Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is a welcome display of the UAE's long stated, but only slowly implemented commitment to empower women. The number of reform-minded ministers with close connections with the U.S. is up significantly, and this looks like good news for us.

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